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Annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women

Statement submitted by Legião da Boa Vontade, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

The Legion of Good Will, a Brazilian civil society organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, which for 60 years has been proposing and implementing humanitarian and socio-educational programmes, continues its widespread awareness work on the themes connected to the Millennium Development Goals.

Aiming at contributing to the annual ministerial review and the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly, the Legion of Good Will sets out in the present statement the results of the 7th Solidary Society Network Multi-stakeholder Forum: 4th Innovation Fair, which was held from 12 to 26 March 2010, in five Latin American countries where the organization carries out its activities (Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Paraguay and Uruguay).

Focusing on Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals, "To promote gender equality and empower women", chosen in accordance with the guidelines of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and with the support of the United Nations information centres for Brazil and for Argentina and Uruguay (UNIC-Rio and UNIC-Buenos Aires), the United Nations Development Programme in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, UNICEF Argentina, the United Nations Population Fund in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, and the United Nations Development Fund for Women in Bolivia, the Forum conducted a national poll employing virtual questionnaires, as well as meetings and exhibition fairs (booths and cultural activities), at which representatives from the public, private and academic spheres and civil society took part. It is worth mentioning that 2,171 social organizations and informal community leadership groups participated, sharing information, success stories and innovative social technologies that today generate positive results that can be replicated.

Throughout its six decades of work, the Legion of Good Will has been promoting the complete education of the human being as the vector of much-needed social transformations. For the Legion of Good Will, the 7th Forum represents more than a contribution towards the internationally agreed commitments that favour gender equality. It also represents a possibility to analyse the theme under a perspective that takes all levels of education and work into consideration, in the equitable control of resources and an egalitarian representation in public life, as an environment dedicated to a legitimate and urgent cause, because from its earliest days, the organization has counted on women's social activism. The majority of the Legion of Good Will staff of volunteers and employees are women.

In Brazil, according to the findings of the Toledo e Associados research institute, 86 per cent of the participants in the human development programmes carried out by the Legion of Good Will are girls and women living in situations of social vulnerability. The organization constantly conducts — within its schools network, homes for the elderly and community centres as well as on its websites, radio and television programmes and in its publications — campaigns for the valorization of life, which make children, young people and families aware of their rights and of the mechanisms for ensuring and enforcing such rights, offering support whenever necessary.

The present document contains proposals and recommendations from the Forum's participants, stemming from their own practical experience, as well as

proposals for a series of innovative social technologies experienced by the Legion of Good Will.

Recommendations

- To ensure a greater inclusion of women in the national development process by encouraging the creation of policies and specific measures for achieving this purpose
- To disseminate national and international normative frameworks in which women's rights are protected
- To devise incentives that increase the participation of women on all levels of decision-making processes
- To devise a national scientific agenda that prioritizes research in the gender area, ensuring financing and the divulgation of the results, especially among the creators of public policies
- To establish public policies on women's complete health care that give priority and resources to gender and ethnicity issues in accordance with local needs, managing policies in the health area in order to enforce their application in the national health system
- To qualify health professionals to deal with gender and ethnicity issues, ensuring appropriate assistance for women in the puerperium and for those who have suffered any form of sexual violence
- To establish continuous formation processes in gender issues within State functions, with an emphasis on the areas of law and public safety
- To increase women's access to credit, productive resources, information and professional qualifications and encourage entrepreneurship
- To implement policies that enable enrolment and permanence in educational institutions for young mothers living in situations of social vulnerability
- To incorporate the subject of gender into the curriculum of teacher training courses as a transversal topic and create courses on this theme for professionals
- To improve labour and social security legislation so as to have it encompass the unpaid work done by mothers and by caretakers of relatives who are elderly or have health problems
- To devise specific measures to protect household workers, especially immigrants
- To increase the number of police stations that are specialized in caring for women
- To structure the means to ensure the eradication of violence against women, especially when it occurs in situations of armed conflict and when it occurs due to discrimination in terms of ethnicity, social and economic status, religions, marital status, sexual orientation or any other form of discrimination

- To increase the use of new technologies by women living in situations of poverty, by means of professional training and an easier access to equipment and connection networks
- To replicate the experience of the Government of Brazil with the implementation of the Maria da Penha Law and the national plan to face violence against women, which has established a new legal landmark in dealing with this matter

The 7th Forum demonstrated that empowering women fulfils Goal 3 and also efficiently broadens the reach of the remaining challenges of the global development agenda. However, the degree of women's vulnerability remains high: they were the first to be impacted by the food and financial crisis; millions fell back to their previous situation of poverty. Today, it is feared that the effects of climate change can deepen gender inequality.

Latin America combines favourable conditions to face this trend. In Brazil, for instance, average female schooling exceeds that of males. There is a significant participation of women in the economy and an increase in the income of the population as a whole.

Another successful example of a recommendation of social technology is the learning and interaction programme applied by the Legion of Good Will for people of various generations within the scope of both formal and informal education and based on the pedagogy of affection and on the ecumenical citizen pedagogy, devised by educator Paiva Netto. The programme's main results demonstrate the perception and critical attitude of participants regarding ethnical, social, territorial and gender prejudices within a perspective in which each person is a spiritual-biopsychosocial being.

The pedagogical proposal on which the programme is based acknowledges the intrinsic peculiarities of the female sex, emphasizing its protagonism in modern days and throughout history, which are echoed in the words of the Legion of Good Will leader,

> Women, the most beautiful side of humanity, singularize the foundation of all great accomplishments. That which physically constitutes us is generated in their wombs (...). Components of the female gender become indispensable elements for the survival of good causes. Stable organizations count on stable women. (...) My intention here is to stress the fact of how important the mission of women is for human evolution and for world safety (...). Our first steps towards the development of citizenship are guided by those who take us by the hand from childhood. World stability begins in the hearts of children. That is why at the Legion of Good Will we have been practising for so many years now what we call the pedagogy of affection and the ecumenical citizen pedagogy.

Aimed at children up to the age of 10, the pedagogy of affection contributes towards girls learning to defend themselves against any violation of their rights since it produces at the same time a bond and a relationship of trust between education professionals and students in the classroom environment and provides an ecumenical and universal insight of values into the context of each age group, strengthening the student's emotional security.

The ecumenical citizen pedagogy applied to young people and adults alike, proposes handling the current everyday situations of students in a transversal manner, with an emphasis on the issues concerning discrimination against women and on the available instruments to prevent it. These practices have an impact on the overall development of students who have achieved excellence with regard to their intellectual formation.

Added to this educational proposal, the learning and interaction programme works in the following manner: at least once a week, a volunteer or hired professional, after undergoing specific training, will mediate weekly meetings of small groups (maximum 30 people, depending on the profile of the members), which can vary a great deal according to the demands and social composition of the community.

Boys and men also participate. With them, their awareness on the meaning of being fathers is addressed as well as the need to improve the sharing of responsibilities in caring for their children and relatives who need special care. From an early stage, youngsters learn what family planning is all about and receive instruction to guide their mothers and sisters on the rights of women. They are brought up in a culture of non-aggression and respect for the female gender.

Understanding that the victimization of women, as with other social problems, begins in the realm of fundamental values, the Legion of Good Will concentrates its efforts on prevention. To this end, it considers education as the most efficient path, especially — but not exclusively — of the newer generations, with the involvement of families as a fundamental factor for the success of these actions.

Therefore, the Legion of Good Will acknowledges schools and other educational environments, such as its community centres and means of communication, as privileged loci to intervene against the social factors contributing to poverty and violence, supporting the idea that other public and private institutions also commit themselves to this same role in their communities, becoming radiating centres of equality and social justice.

On this opportunity, the Legion of Good Will wishes to warmly greet all the women and men who have demonstrated an impartial partnership towards this accomplishment, focusing on the acknowledgement and diffusion of equal rights and shared responsibilities, invigorating and strengthening the militancy for a solidary, altruistic and ecumenical society. The Legion of Good Will forges ahead in the diffusion of these themes through the use of radio and television broadcasting and digital means of communication. Other contributions, not contained in the present document, are available from www.boavontade.com and www.legionofgoodwill.org.